

file: Central Intelligence - Origins (CIA Plans/State)

10 December 1945

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF WAR
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

SUBJECT: National Intelligence Authority.

By letter of September 20, 1945, the President gave me the following instructions:

"I particularly desire that you take the lead in developing a comprehensive and coordinated foreign intelligence program for all Federal agencies concerned with that type of activity. This should be done through the creation of an interdepartmental group, heading up under the State Department, which would formulate plans for my approval. This procedure will permit the planning of complete coverage of the foreign intelligence field and the assigning and controlling of operations in such manner that the needs of both the individual agencies and the Government as a whole will be met with maximum effectiveness."

Attached is a Plan for carrying out the President's directive. It has been recommended to me by my Staff Committee after several weeks of discussion and study, and I now recommend it for your favorable consideration.

Attention is invited especially to the following points:

a. The Plan sets up a National Intelligence Authority consisting of the Secretary of State as Chairman and the Secretaries of War and Navy, but authorizes the Chairman to call in the heads of other Departments and agencies on matters of special interest to them.

b. The Plan is designed to make fullest use of the intelligence resources of all agencies of the Government, by coordinating their efforts under a comprehensive, Government-wide program. The proposed machinery is an interdepartmental organization under the Authority, with personnel drawn from existing agencies, rather than an independent agency with a separate budget. This is considered advantageous because it tends (1) to avoid publicity and (2) to reduce competition and duplication between the central agency and the intelligence organizations of existing departments and agencies.

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c. Executive direction of the central agency is put in the hands of an official of the Department of State, but it is provided that the Secretaries of War and Navy must approve the person selected. In that manner the coordinating responsibility of the State Department for matters involving foreign affairs is recognized, but the executive is made a representative of the Authority as a whole, and not merely of a single Department.

d. The central Secretariat is envisaged as a working staff of personnel contributed primarily by the State, War and Navy Departments.

e. The Plan does not preclude any centralized intelligence operations (either under the central agency or outside of it) which may prove feasible and desirable as the program of the Authority is developed. It provides planning mechanisms that may well lead to centralization of intelligence responsibilities in many of the specialized fields, either (1) by vesting responsibility for a particular field in a single existing agency or (2) by bringing together the working units of several agencies on a subject into a joint unit under direction of the Authority.

f. With respect to clandestine activities ("secret intelligence" and "counter-espionage") I understand the prevailing opinion to be that such operations, if they are to be conducted, might well be under a central agency; and the Plan sets up machinery for study of that problem in detail and for development of specific operating plans in those fields.

The central agency is conceived in the first instance as a coordinating and planning mechanism, whose mission is to develop the comprehensive program envisaged by the President; to determine foreign intelligence requirements on a Government-wide basis, and to recommend means and methods for meeting those requirements, making use of all the intelligence resources of the Government. Many agencies, in addition to the State, War and Navy Departments, are engaged in collection and analysis of foreign information, including the Treasury, the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce and Labor, the Tariff and Maritime Commissions, the Federal Reserve Board and numerous others. Such agencies can make important contributions to foreign intelligence if they work under a coordinated program, so that, within their special fields, they may serve the needs of other Government agencies as well as their own.

Under the Plan as proposed, the primary coordinating mechanism is a group of interdepartmental Committees for the various fields of intelligence, which, in addition to their planning functions, will

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"Serve as a continuing group responsible for maintaining a coordinated program and for reviewing the adequacy and efficiency of all operations involved in the carrying out of such a program." Tentative suggestions for the principal Committees to be formed are shown on the chart annexed hereto.

Foreign intelligence is a vast and complicated subject, touching upon almost all fields of human knowledge. The problems that it involves do not lend themselves to quick and easy solutions. They must be attacked in detail, and from a long-range standpoint, and on a comprehensive basis.- It is believed that the annexed Plan permits that kind of an approach to the subject and gives promise of good results if the execution of the Plan is put in competent hands.

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